

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

Amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-55. (Canceled)

56. (Currently Amended) An isolated polypeptide or peptide comprising [[5]] 8 or more contiguous amino acids of

~~an HCV type 3a polypeptide or peptide~~ selected from the region spanning positions 1646 to 1764 of the NS3/NS4 region of HCV type 3a;

wherein said peptide or polypeptide contains at least one amino acid selected from the group consisting of T1656, L1663, H1685, E1687, G1689, Y1705, A1714, A1721, V1723, H1726, Q1743, A1744, E1747, I1749, A1759 and H1762, wherein said amino acid numbering is relative to the HCV polyprotein.

Claims 57 and 58. (Canceled)

59. (Currently Amended) An isolated HCV type 3a polypeptide comprising an amino acid sequence or peptide selected from the group consisting of

(i) SEQ ID NO: 36, and

(ii) at least [[5]] 8 contiguous amino acids from the polypeptide or peptide of (i) having at least one amino acid selected from the group consisting of T1656, L1663, H1685, E1687, G1689, Y1705, A1714, A1721, V1723, H1726, Q1743, A1744, E1747,

I1749, A1759 and H1762, wherein said amino acid numbering is relative to the HCV polyprotein.

Claims 60-74. (Canceled)

75. (Withdrawn) A polypeptide or peptide according to claim 56, wherein said polypeptide or peptide is selected from the following peptides:

LGGKPAIVPDKEVLYQQYDE (SEQ ID NO:97)

SQAAPYIEQAQVIAHQFKEK (SEQ ID NO:99)

IAHQFKEKVLGLLQRATQQQ (SEQ ID NO:100).

76. (Previously Presented) A composition comprising an isolated polypeptide or peptide according to any of claims 56 or 59 or 75.

77. (Currently Amended) A method for raising antibodies comprising administering to a mammal a polypeptide or peptide selected from the group consisting of

(i) an isolated polypeptide or peptide comprising at least 14 contiguous amino acids selected from the region spanning positions 1646 to 1764 of the NS3/4 protein of HCV type 3a;

(ii) an isolated polypeptide or peptide with SEQ ID NO:36; and

(iii) an isolated polypeptide or peptide comprising at least 14 contiguous amino acids of SEQ ID NO:36;

wherein said polypeptide or peptide of (i), (ii) or (iii) contains at least one amino acid selected from the group consisting of T1656, L1663, H1685, E1687, G1689, Y1705, A1714, A1721, V1723, H1726, Q1743, A1744, E1747, I1749, A1759, and H1762, wherein said amino acid numbering is relative to the HCV polyprotein

~~according to any of claims 56 or 59 or 75 to a mammal.~~

78. (Previously Presented) A method of detecting, screening or confirmation of the presence of HCV antibodies present in a biological sample, comprising the following steps:

- (i) providing a sample suspected of containing HCV antibody,
- (ii) contacting the sample with a polypeptide or peptide according to any of claims 56 or 59 or 75, under appropriate conditions allowing the formation of an immune complex,
- (iii) inferring from the presence of the immune complex of step (ii) the presence of HCV antibodies in said sample.

79. (Previously Presented) A method of detecting, screening or confirmation of one or more HCV serotypes present in a biological sample, comprising the following steps:

- (i) providing a sample suspected of containing HCV antibody,
- (ii) contacting the sample with a polypeptide or peptide according to any of claims 56 or 59 or 75, under appropriate conditions allowing the formation of an immune complex,
- (iii) inferring from the presence of one or more of these immune complexes of step (ii) the serotype(s) present in said sample.

80. (Previously Presented) A method for detecting HCV serotype(s) present in a biological sample liable to contain it, comprising at least the following steps:

- (i) contacting the biological sample to be analyzed for the presence of HCV antibodies with at least one peptide or polypeptide according to any of claims 56 or 59 or 75, preferentially in an immobilized form under appropriate conditions which allow the formation of an immune complex, wherein said polypeptide or peptide is preferentially in the form of a biotinylated polypeptide or peptide and is covalently bound to a solid substrate by means of streptavidin or avidin complexes,
- (ii) removing unbound components,
- (iii) incubating the immune complexes formed with heterologous antibodies, which specifically bind to the antibodies present in the sample to be analyzed, with said heterologous antibodies having conjugated to a detectable label under appropriate conditions,

(iv) detecting the presence of said immune complexes visually or by means of densitometry and inferring the HCV serotype(s) present from the observed binding pattern.

81. (Previously Presented) A method for confirmation of HCV serotype(s) present in a biological sample liable to contain it, comprising at least the following steps:

(i) contacting the biological sample to be analyzed for the presence of HCV antibodies with at least one peptide or polypeptide according to any of claims 56 or 59 or 75, preferentially in an immobilized form under appropriate conditions which allow the formation of an immune complex, wherein said polypeptide or peptide is preferentially in the form of a biotinylated polypeptide or peptide and is covalently bound to a solid substrate by means of streptavidin or avidin complexes,

(ii) removing unbound components,

(iii) incubating the immune complexes formed with heterologous antibodies, which specifically bind to the antibodies present in the sample to be analyzed, with said heterologous antibodies having conjugated to a detectable label under appropriate conditions,

(iv) detecting the presence of said immune complexes visually or by means of densitometry and confirm the HCV serotype(s) present from the observed binding pattern.

82. (Previously Presented) A kit for detecting, screening or confirmation for one or more HCV serotype(s) present in a biological sample, comprising:

- (i) a polypeptide or peptide according to any of claims 56 or 59 or 75,
- (ii) optionally a buffer and components necessary for producing the formation of an immune complex,
- (iii) optionally a means for detecting, screening or confirming the immune complex(es) formed.

83. (Previously Presented) A kit for detecting, screening or confirmation for the presence of HCV antibodies present in a biological sample, comprising:

- (i) a polypeptide or peptide according to any of claims 56 or 59 or 75,
- (ii) optionally a buffer and components necessary for producing the formation of an immune complex,
- (iii) optionally a means for detecting, screening or confirming the immune complex formed.

84. (Previously Presented) A kit for detecting HCV serotype(s) present in a biological sample liable to contain it, comprising at least the following components:

- (i) at least a polypeptide or peptide according to any of claims 56 or 59 or 75, with said polypeptide or peptide being preferentially immobilized on a solid substrate, and more preferentially on one and the same membrane strip,

(ii) a buffer and components necessary for producing the buffer enabling binding reaction between these polypeptides or peptides and the antibodies against HCV present in the biological sample,

(iii) optionally, a detector for determining the presence of immune complexes formed in the preceding binding reaction, and

(iv) optionally an automated scanning and interpretation device to confirm the HCV serotype(s) present in the sample from the observed binding pattern.

85. (Previously Presented) A kit for confirmation of HCV serotype(s) present in a biological sample liable to contain it, comprising at least the following components:

(i) at least a polypeptide or peptide according to any of claims 56 or 59 or 75, with said polypeptide or peptide being preferentially immobilized on a solid substrate, and more preferentially on one and the same membrane strip,

(ii) a buffer and components necessary for producing the buffer enabling binding reaction between these polypeptides or peptides and the antibodies against HCV present in the biological sample,

(iii) optionally, a detector for determining the presence of immune complexes formed in the preceding binding reaction, and

(iv) optionally, an automated scanning and interpretation device to confirm the HCV serotype(s) present in the sample from the observed binding pattern.

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Claims 86-91. (Canceled)